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ABSTRACT

In an effort to provide more detailed information than had been provided by previous surveys of student satisfaction, the Office of Research and Planning at Nova Southeastern University used a localized survey to focus on a variety of task and process issues of importance to the Office of Student Financial Assistance. Surveys were mailed to 1,1050 students from the entire population of students enrolled in the 2001 winter term, and responses were received from 271. Because many students did not provide enough information to identify their academic center, it was possible that there was uneven representation in the responding sample, and it was difficult to provide comparisons between populations, invited sample, and responding sample. Responses to the survey statements were quite positive, with 92% of all statements receiving a modal rating of 4 or greater (1=low, and 5=high). One interesting finding was that although nearly two-thirds of all respondents indicated a willingness to use a computer with an online service to check financial aid status, only one-third of respondents indicated a willingness to use a computer to apply for loans online, and more than half indicated that U.S. mail was the preferred means for notification of student balance. This suggests that the University's students may not be ready to embrace computer-mediated telecommunications as the exclusive means of managing their financial aid resources. (SLD)

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# AN EVALUATION OF NOVA SOUTHEASTERN UNIVERSITY'S OFFICE OF STUDENT FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE

## *QUALITY SERVICE SURVEY 2001-2002*

**Thomas W. MacFarland**

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**Nova Southeastern University**
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**Report 01-10**

**June 2001**

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**AN EVALUATION OF NOVA SOUTHEASTERN UNIVERSITY'S OFFICE OF STUDENT FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE**
***QUALITY SERVICE SURVEY 2001-2002***

**Thomas W. MacFarland** **Senior Research Associate**
**Report 01-10** **June 2001**

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Nova Southeastern University's Office of Research and Planning has prepared an extensive series of reports that focused on student satisfaction with academic resources and administrative services. By design, many of the survey statements were broad-based and the surveys were not meant to go into extensive depth for issues that may have specific importance only to individual administrative units.

This concern about depth was expressed by the University's Office of Student Financial Assistance. The purpose of this study was to address this concern and to use a localized survey that would focus on a variety of exclusive task and process issues of critical importance to the Office of Student Financial Assistance.

The population for this study consisted of all Winter Term 2001 students enrolled at the time survey selection was conducted (N = 17,709 students on March 5, 2001). The invited sample was represented by a collection of mailing labels generated by the Office of Information Technology and selection was structured as a mechanical (every $n^{th}$) sample of all Winter Term 2001 students who used the services of the Office of Student Financial Assistance (N = 1,050 mailing labels). Information was provided to Research and Planning to later determine if the invited sample was representative of the population, by academic center.

Survey response rate was 26 percent (N Invited Sample = 1,050 students and N Responding Sample = 271 students). Based on tracking data maintained by Research and Planning, it must be cautioned that there may be a level of uneven representation in the responding sample by academic center. Specifically, there is a concern that students from the Farquhar Center for Undergraduate Studies may be under-represented and that students from the Fischler Graduate School of Education and Human Services may be over-represented. However, approximately 25 percent of all survey respondents did not provide sufficient information to identify their academic center. Because of this omission, it is difficult to provide a definite comparison of academic center between population, invited sample, and responding sample.

Responses to Likert-type survey statements were quite positive and 92 percent of all statements (12 of 13) received a modal rating of 4 or greater (1 = Low to 5 = High). All mean responses were greater than 3.00.

This survey was also structured to query respondents on issues associated with various communication media and process options. It was interesting to note that although nearly two-thirds of all respondents indicated a willingness to use a computer with an online service to check financial aid status, only one-third of all respondents indicated a willingness to use a computer with an online service to apply for loans and more than half of all respondents indicated that U.S. mail is the preferred means for notification of student balance. The University's students may not be quite ready to fully embrace computer-mediated telecommunications as the exclusive means of managing their financial aid resources.

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## INTRODUCTION

### Background

Nova Southeastern University's Office of Research and Planning previously prepared an extensive series of reports in 1996 that focused on student satisfaction with academic resources and administrative services. The survey statements were broad-based and covered a wide variety of academic and administrative issues.

Along with their immediate use to serve as a resource to support the internal decision-making processes at the University, these reports were also prepared for external use. Specifically, these reports were prepared in the expectation that they would help satisfy the many Institutional Effectiveness (and other) reporting requirements associated with the University's reaffirmation of accreditation by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools.

During Fall Term 1999, the common part of the various 1996 surveys was used to prepare a survey that would provide an update to the information gained from these many prior reports. Results of this Fall Term 1999 survey process have since been published in a series of more contemporary reports on student satisfaction with academic resources and administrative services:

- *Fall Term 1999 Nova Southeastern University Students Respond to a Broad-Based Satisfaction Survey* (Research and Planning Report 00-09, May 2000)
- *Fall Term 1999 Nova Southeastern University Students Respond to a Broad-Based Satisfaction Survey: Breakouts by Student Service Center Locations* (Research and Planning Report 00-26, December 2000)
- *Fall Term 1999 Nova Southeastern University Students Respond to a Broad-Based Satisfaction Survey: A Comparison of Campus-Based Students and Distance Education Students* (Research and Planning Report 01-03, February 2001).
- *Fall Term 1999 Nova Southeastern University Students Respond to a Broad-Based Satisfaction Survey: A Comparison of Students by Age ( ≤ 25 Years and ≥ 26 Years)* (Research and Planning Report 01-06, April 2001).

## Purpose of This Study

The prior surveys were broad-based and covered a wide variety of academic and administrative issues. These surveys were not designed to go into depth for issues that may have specific importance to individual administrative units.

This concern about depth was expressed by the University's Office of Student Financial Assistance. Based on actions from this feedback process, the purpose of this study was to use a localized survey that would focus on a variety of exclusive task and process issues of critical importance to the Office of Student Financial Assistance.

When considering the purpose of this study, it should be emphasized that this survey activity is not a singular action but it is instead part of a continuous and extensive investigative process that examines the University's Institutional Effectiveness from a variety of perspectives. Further, the process associated with this study was designed to serve as a contemporary model for internal assessment that may be of use to other administrative units at the University. Similar services by Research and Planning have been provided to staff in the University's Library and the University's Office of Human Resources and Payroll.

## METHODOLOGY

Recognizing that there was a need for assistance with survey methodology, Research and Planning was originally contacted on July 7, 2000, by personnel from the Office of Student Financial Services and general-level suggestions about sample selection and survey process were offered. A formal consultation took place on February 5, 2001, and soon after the Office of Student Financial Services prepared a draft survey instrument and an accompanying outline of needs and proposed actions.

Based on this information, Research and Planning was able to work with the University's Office of Information Technology to identify the population and the invited sample as follows:

- The population consisted of all Winter Term 2001 students enrolled at the time sample selection was conducted (N = 17,709 students on March 5, 2001).
- The invited sample was represented by a collection of mailing labels generated by the Office of Information Technology and selection was structured as a mechanical (every $n^{th}$) sample of all Winter Term 2001 students who used the services of the Office of Student Financial Assistance (N = 1,050 mailing labels).

Full details on these parameters, the population, the invited sample, and the responding sample are provided in Table 1.

The survey was distributed by U.S. mail, with instructions that the survey should be returned by May 15, 2001.

On April 5, 2001, Research and Planning received an advance set of returned surveys and used these surveys to prepare a data entry template, with the expectation that the Office of Student Financial Assistance would have responsibility for this task. This expectation was met and by April 9, 2001, Research and Planning had prepared data analysis templates that were accepted by the Office of Student Financial Assistance.

The data file prepared by the Office of Student Financial Assistance was made available to Research and Planning on May 22, 2001. This file was used against the previously prepared templates and an initial set of analyses was provided to the Office of Student Financial Assistance on May 25, 2001. These analyses were used to prepare a set of draft tables on June 13, 2001, and after an appropriate level of review and feedback these draft tables served as the basis for this report.

## RESULTS

As detailed in Table 1, the survey response rate was 26 percent (N Invited Sample = 1,050 students and N Responding Sample = 271 students). Table 1 also details survey response by academic center, to gain a sense of the representation of the responding sample by academic center.

Based on the presentation in Table 1, it must be cautioned that there may be a level of uneven representation in the responding sample by academic center. Specifically, there is a concern that students from the Farquhar Center for Undergraduate Studies may be under-represented and that students from the Fischler Graduate School of Education and Human Services may be over-represented. However, approximately 25 percent of all survey respondents did not provide sufficient information to identify academic center. Because of this omission, it is difficult to provide a definite comparison of academic center between population, invited sample, and responding sample.

Responses to Likert-type survey statements are provided in Table 2. Responses to Likert-type survey statements were quite positive and 92 percent of all statements (12 of 13) received a modal rating of 4 or greater (1 = Low to 5 = High). All mean responses were greater than 3.00 and the lowest mean response (Mean = 3.10 and SD = 1.41) dealt with satisfaction with the speed of receiving funds from the Financial Aid Office.

Responses to inventory-type survey statements and a forced set of selections and options are provided in Table 3. These statements are largely geared toward process issues associated with financial aid and the willingness of students to use various actions and communication media to meet their current and future needs. A few highlights from Table 3 include:

- Nearly two-thirds of all respondents indicated satisfaction with financial aid processing.
- Nearly two-thirds of all respondents indicated a willingness to use a computer with an online service to check financial aid status.
- Only one-third of all respondents indicated a willingness to use a computer with an online service to apply for loans.
- More than half of all respondents indicated that U.S. mail is the preferred means for notification of student balance.

## SUMMARY

This report provided evidence that students are generally satisfied with the services offered by the Office of Student Financial Assistance:

- Over 92 percent of all statements (12 of 13) received a modal rating of 4 or greater (1 = Low to 5 = High).
- All mean responses were greater than 3.00.
- Nearly two-thirds of all respondents indicated satisfaction with financial aid processing.

This survey also queried respondents on issues associated with various communication media and process options. It was interesting to note that although nearly two-thirds of all respondents indicated a willingness to use a computer with an online service to check financial aid status, only one-third of all respondents indicated a willingness to use a computer with an online service to apply for loans and more than half of all respondents indicated that U.S. mail is the preferred means for notification of student balance. The University's students may not be quite ready to fully embrace computer-mediated telecommunications as the exclusive means of managing their financial aid resources.

Along with the usefulness of this report for internal decision-making, this report is also useful in that it serves as another set of evidence on the seriousness of the University's commitment to the

Institutional Effectiveness process. The University is compelled by the Commission on Colleges of the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools to give continual attention to the issue of Institutional Effectiveness (*Criteria for Accreditation*; 1998, pp. 19-22) and this commitment includes attention to administrative processes as well as academic programs. This report is another in a broad set of reporting activities that help the University meet this mandate.

## REFERENCES


Commission on Colleges of the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools. (1998). *Criteria for Accreditation*. Decatur, Georgia.

*Fall Term 1999 Nova Southeastern University Students Respond to a Broad-Based Satisfaction Survey*. (2000). Fort Lauderdale, Florida: Nova Southeastern University. Research and Planning Report 00-09.

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*Fall Term 1999 Nova Southeastern University Students Respond to a Broad-Based Satisfaction Survey: A Comparison of Campus-Based Students and Distance Education Students*. (2001). Fort Lauderdale, Florida: Nova Southeastern University. Research and Planning Report 01-03.

*Fall Term 1999 Nova Southeastern University Students Respond to a Broad-Based Satisfaction Survey: A Comparison of Students by Age ($\leq$ 25 Years and $\geq$ 26 Years)*. (2001). Fort Lauderdale, Florida: Nova Southeastern University. Research and Planning Report 01-06.

## APPENDIX

### Table 1

**Office of Student Financial Assistance *Quality Service Survey 2001-2002* Frequency Distribution of Population[1], Invited Sample[2], and Responding Sample[3] by Academic Center**

| Academic Center | Population | | Invited Sample | | Responding Sample | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | N | % | N | % | N | % Valid | % Total |
| The Center for Psychological Studies ..... | 905 | 5 | 65 | 6 | 13 | 6 | 5 |
| The Farquhar Center for Undergraduate Studies ..... | 3,880 | 22 | 261 | 25 | 35 | 17 | 13 |
| The Fischler Graduate School of Education and Human Services ..... | 6,212 | 35 | 328 | 31 | 73 | 36 | 27 |
| Health Professions Division ..... | 2,521 | 14 | 197 | 19 | 45 | 22 | 17 |

1 Population refers to Winter Term 2001 enrollment (N Population = 17,709 students) on March 5, 2001, which is when the mailing labels were generated.

2 Mailing labels, which represented inclusion in the invited sample (N Invited Sample = 1,050 students), were generated by the Office for Information Technologies (OIT). OIT was instructed to select from Winter Term 2001 students who used the Services of the Office of Student Financial Assistance and from that list to generate approximately 1,000 mailing labels.

3 Approximately 25 percent (N = 68 respondents) of all survey respondents (N Responding Sample = 271 or 26 percent of Invited Sample) did not provide sufficient information to identify Academic Center. Accordingly, percentage return is listed as % Total (all respondents) and % Valid (all respondents with an identified Academic Center). This presentation allows a meaningful comparison of Academic Center between Population, Invited Sample, and Responding Sample.

| Academic Center | Population | | Invited Sample | | Responding Sample | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | N | % | N | % | N | % Valid | % Total |
| The Oceanographic Center | 113 | <1 | 7 | <1 | 1 | <1 | <1 |
| The Huizenga Graduate School of Business and Entrepreneurship | 2,268 | 13 | 88 | 8 | 20 | 10 | 7 |
| The Graduate School of Computer and Information Sciences | 643 | 4 | 14 | 1 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| The Graduate School of Humanities and Social Sciences | 294 | 2 | 17 | 2 | 4 | 2 | 2 |
| The Shepard Broad Law Center | 873 | 5 | 73 | 7 | 9 | 4 | 3 |
| Unidentified | | | | | 68 | | 25 |
| Total | 17,709 | | 1,050 | | 271 | | |

**Table 2**

**Responses to Office of Student Financial Assistance *Quality Service Survey 2001-2002* Likert-Scale[4] Survey Statements**

| Statement | N | Mode | Median | Mean | SD |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| How would you rate the quality of service you received from the: | | | | | |
| Financial Aid Office | 262 | 4 | 4 | 3.38 | 1.27 |
| Bursar's Office | 255 | 4 | 4 | 3.63 | 1.10 |
| How courteous was the service you received from: | | | | | |
| Financial Aid personnel | 265 | 4 | 4 | 3.86 | 1.05 |
| Bursar's Office | 256 | 4 | 4 | 3.93 | .95 |

[4] The attached survey provides a reprint of survey statements and potential responses. Likert-scale responses ranged from 5 (High) to 1 (Low) and used identifiers such as:

| 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Excellent | Good | Adequate | Not Very Good | Poor |
| Very Courteous | Courteous | Neutral | Not Very Courteous | Not at all Courteous |
| Completely Satisfied | Satisfied | Neutral | Somewhat Dissatisfied | Very Dissatisfied |

| Statement | N | Mode | Median | Mean | SD |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Were your questions/concerns answered to your satisfaction in the: | | | | | |
| Financial Aid Office | 262 | 4 | 4 | 3.43 | 1.33 |
| Bursar's Office | 253 | 4 | 4 | 3.67 | 1.07 |
| How would you rate the service provided by the management of the: | | | | | |
| Financial Aid Office | 232 | 4 | 4 | 3.41 | 1.34 |
| Bursar's Office | 224 | 4 | 4 | 3.70 | 1.07 |
| In applying for financial aid, how would you rate the process | 261 | 3 | 3 | 3.25 | 1.31 |
| How satisfied are you with the speed in receiving your funds from the: | | | | | |
| Financial Aid Office | 260 | 4 | 3 | 3.10 | 1.41 |
| Bursar's Office | 234 | 4 | 4 | 3.29 | 1.31 |
| How would you rate the Student Financial Services One-Stop Shop | 165 | 4 | 4 | 3.51 | 1.09 |

| Statement | N | Mode | Median | Mean | SD |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| How satisfied are you with the quality of service you receive at Nova Southeastern University | 255 | 4 | 4 | 3.51 | 1.21 |

Table 3

**Responses to Office of Student Financial Assistance *Quality Service Survey 2001-2002* Inventory-Type Survey Statements**

| Statement | N | % Total |
|---|---|---|
| Was your financial aid processed to your satisfaction? | | |
| Yes | 172 | 64 |
| No | 99 | 37 |
| Checked a willingness to use the computer for the following on-line services? | | |
| Checking financial aid status | 181 | 67 |
| Applying for financial aid | 146 | 54 |
| Completing loan entrance/exit interviews | 102 | 38 |
| Checking your award letter | 134 | 49 |
| Applying for loans on-line | 98 | 36 |
| Viewing general financial aid information | 161 | 59 |
| Viewing general bursar's information | 131 | 48 |
| Checking the balance on your student account | 162 | 60 |

| Statement | N | % Total |
|---|---|---|
| How were you notified of the balance in your student account? | | |
| Web | 62 | 23 |
| U.S. Mail | 204 | 75 |
| Walk-in | 24 | 9 |
| How would you prefer notification of your student account balance? | | |
| Web | 73 | 27 |
| U.S. Mail | 158 | 58 |
| Email | 77 | 28 |
| What payment method do you use? | | |
| Cash | 4 | 2 |
| Check | 67 | 25 |
| Credit Card | 39 | 14 |
| Financial Aid | 212 | 78 |
| Do you deal directly with the Bursar's Office in making payments? | | |
| Yes | 95 | 35 |

| Statement | N | % Total |
|---|---|---|
| No | 176 | 65 |
| If available, would you make a payment on the Web? | | |
| Yes | 95 | 35 |
| No | 176 | 35 |
| If yes, what method would you use? | | |
| Checking Account | 70 | 26 |
| Credit Card | 52 | 19 |
| Did you ever receive a refund? | | |
| Yes | 218 | 80 |
| No | 53 | 20 |
| If yes, what method did you use? | | |
| Direct Deposit | 111 | 41 |
| Check | 116 | 43 |

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